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The Lodi Post Office



The Post Office building as it appeared shortly after construction in 1936. This building was remodeled and added to in the 1980s. San Joaquin Historical Society photo

by Maurice Hill

The local post office was established under the name of Mokelumne on Nov. 19, 1869. The office name was changed to Lodi on Feb. 25, 1873.

The beginning of the post office is linked to that of Lodi's hotel history, for the post office was first located in the old Hooker House which stood near the railroad tracks on the southeast corner of west Lockeford and north Sacramento streets.

The hotel building served as an all-purpose building as it was, besides being a hotel, a store, a depot, a post office and headquarters for the stage line.

Daniel Crist, proprietor of the Hooker House, was not only Mokelumne's first hotel proprietor, but also the first postmaster, from Nov. 19, 1869 to Nov. 27, 1874.

In the "Stockton Reader" for July 25, 1874 there is a notice regarding Mrs.

Dan Crist. It relates that Mrs. Crist, wife of Lodi's postmaster was awakened during the night by a noise in the kitchen. Taking a lamp she went out to find the cause of the noise. She discovered two men who had just broken into the kitchen through the window. On the appearance of Mrs. Crist, the men rushed through the door, falling over garden tools in their haste to escape. Nothing was taken so it was surmised they were pantry thieves. They left a coat and a pair of shoes behind them in their flight.

From 1874 to Nov. 21, 1881, Byron De la Beckwith was the postmaster. Mr. Beckwith had the distinction of being Lodi's first druggist.

From Nov. 21, 1881 to May 24, 1886 Robert L. Graham was postmaster. Mr. Graham was also a druggist having bought out Mr. Beckwith.

From post office records it would appear that the post office was located at

the Central Pacific Railroad station from 1881 to 1886.

All mail going out of town and any mail that came into the town of Lodi ended up at the railroad depot. There is a large doubt that the actual post office was at the railway station.

The second and third postmasters of Lodi were both druggists located in a building on the north side of Elm Street near Sacramento Street. It would be very difficult to mix drugs a block and a half away from the mail sorting and stamp selling location.

The biggest argument for having had the post office on Elm Street is a Lodi Sentinel article of September 1884 calling Graham's Drug location the Post Office Drug Store.

James A. Ellison was postmaster from May 24, 1886 to Dec. 17, 1888. From the Lodi Cyclone it is learned that Mr. Ellison appointed J. Scott Ecker as assistant postmaster.



Sorting the U.S. mail was a labor intensive task. Left to right, Orlando Radtke, unknown, Bill Mattice, Bill Campbell, Bob Mason.

San Joaquin Historical Society photo

The Lodi Cyclone also states on June 24, 1886 that "Mr. Ellison received his commission as postmaster from Washington" and was to take possession as postmaster on July 1, 1886. This date is in conflict with the date in local post office records.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Ellison, in June of 1882, secured a mail route between Mokelumne Hill via Railroad Flat and West Point. Railroad Flat was on the line of the Narrow Gauge and was 16 miles from the Big Trees. Ellison also purchased the mail route between Stockton and Oakdale via Collegeville, Atlanta and Burwood. "Uncle Jimmy" was quoted as saying that if he didn't get the nomination for County Assessor, upon the Democratic ticket, he would go into the staging business again after the election.

There is a notice in the Lodi Sentinel for July 3, 1886 which states that "Post Master Ellison is having the brick building near Green's (Green Bros. General Merchandise Store was completed November 1882) repaired and refitted for the new post office." The businessmen of the town would have been pleased if it had been relocated near the business center. On July 15th the new post office was said to be in

Green's building on Sacramento Street (middle of the block between west Pine and west Oak streets) and was a great improvement to the old one, being a nice clean room and neatly papered. Here again the records are clouded, for post office records state that in 1886 the post office location was still at the Central Pacific depot. However, it is possible and seems probable, judging from the newspaper accounts that the post office moved into the Green building by July of 1886. This must have been a somewhat temporary location for by 1887 the location was in a building in the center of the block (north side of the street, between Sacramento and School on Elm Street. This was the location apparently from 1887.

Harvey S. Clark, Sr., was a farmer who had lost an arm. He then prepared himself for a different lifestyle. By the year 1886, he was the librarian for the Lodi Library and Reading Room. He held this position until the Carnegie Library was built 24 years later.

December 17, 1888 Harvey S. Clark, Sr. was appointed postmaster.

The Odd Fellows Lodge had completed a new two story brick building

on the northwest corner of Elm and Sacramento streets with Graham's Drug Store on the first floor and the lodge on the second. The dedication was June 16, 1886.

The location of the post office remained the same until 1894. Early that year the post office moved into the lower north section of the Odd Fellows building. The next building north contained the Post Office Restaurant, a fixture for many years.

The next year Harvey S. Clark, Jr. became assistant postmaster to his father. Harvey, Jr. had worked three years for the Sentinel as a printer.

April 25, 1901, Harvey S. Clark, Jr. replaced his father as postmaster. He served for the next 13 years.

September 5, 1909 the Lodi post office started the delivery of mail to the homes and offices in the business area. The latter had three deliveries and four collections every work day and the residents had mail delivered twice a day with three collections.

Carrier number one was Charles C. Gross. Number two carrier was George G. Gillespie and substitute mailman was Leon C. Lattin.

About the same time the Lodi rural delivery was inaugurated.

The Lodi Sentinel reported April 3, 1912 that "the post office lease for the quarters in the Odd Fellows Building will expire September 30 of this year and it is understood that the Odd Fellows Lodge does not care to retain the post office."

Five years earlier the lodge gave the post office a lease at \$33.33 a month. The agreement compelled the Odd Fellows to furnish water, lights, coal and any additional fixtures that from time to time became necessary and were asked for. The fixtures alone cost the lodge \$2,000 which represented almost a total loss.

At the time the lease was given a number of the merchants in the vicinity of Sacramento and Elm streets, realizing that the post office was a drawing card, subscribed \$27.50 a month, this was to offset the small amount of rent that the lodge was receiving. This plan worked all right for about a year, but then one by one the stores changed hands and the revenue decreased until by 1912, the Order of Odd Fellows received only \$5 per month from this source.

Not long after the lease expired, the post office moved to 206 North Sacramento Street. Outwardly, it was smaller in appearance than the former post office which had a large entrance space flanked by rows of mail boxes. But possibly, inwardly, it was larger,

giving more space to the postal employees.

John M. McMahon became postmaster January 27, 1914, replacing Harvey Clark who was elected City Clerk of Lodi and served for the next seven years.

Mr. McMahon served as postmaster until April 28, 1921 when Claude R. Keagle took charge.

By the first of December the same year the post office quarters were declared to be inadequate.

Mr. Keagle was in office only a year when Emerson B. Herrick was appointed postmaster May 16, 1922 by a new federal administration.

In September of that same year Herrick was notified to vacate the present quarters by the first of October.

The post office did move on time into the new location on the south side of west Oak Street between School and Church streets in a building owned by the City Improvement Company. It remained there for the next 14 years.

As the town grew, efforts began for the securing of a new home for the Lodi post office. On March 18, 1933 the first survey of the potential sites was made.

It was the custom of each new United States president to appoint postmasters of the same political party. In 1932 the administration changed, and August 1, 1933 Charles M. Jones,



John Koenig served as Lodi's postmaster for many years. He began his career in 1923 and was named postmaster in 1953.

Below: In the late '40s the post office purchased new International trucks to be used for mail delivery. Posing proudly with the new fleet are, from left, unknown, Ray Jahnel, Oscar Ditmanson, Bill Ashbaugh and unknown.

Photos courtesy San Joaquin Historical Society





John Koenig, center wearing suit, pitches in to help (from left) Merle Fisher, Robert Leighton, and an unknown worker in the back room at the post office. San Joaquin Historical Society Photo

Democrat, replaced Republican Emerson B. Herrick.

Homes were removed from the proposed building site, northeast corner of School and Walnut streets as plans were formulated for the new post office.

On August 20, 1935, bids were opened in Washington, D.C., and on November 19, 1935, the contract was awarded to the Frank J. Reilly Company of San Francisco.

Construction of the post office started on January 6, 1936. The 25,800 square feet concrete structure with reinforced steel had a 10 foot basement with a main floor of 14 feet elevation. The tile roof was held by steel trusses.

Two rooms not intended for public view were the vault to house the postal receipts and the mailing room with its double doors.

The dedication of the new Lodi post office cornerstone took place on July 11, 1936.

Mayor G. M. Steele gave the address of welcome. The assistant postmaster general, the first inspector of the U.S. Post Office Department, as well as the district inspector were introduced.

The Drum and Bugle Corps of Lodi Post No. 22, American Legion, under the baton of William J. Comartin, gave a musical program. A squad of legion-

naires with a bugler playing a salute to the colors raised the American flag, for the first time, over the building. A squad from Battery F, 143rd Field Artillery, formed a guard of honor for the flag.

Postmaster Jones issued an invitation to the public to attend the ceremonies when the building was completed.

Articles included in the cornerstone box were made up of lists of current and former post office employees, copies of the Lodi News-Sentinel and Lodi Times plus membership lists of all Lodi organizations.

Charles M. Jones had the longest span as postmaster, 23 years, but this came to an end April 16, 1945 when Clyde H. Gregg was named to the job. Oscar Ditmanson followed Gregg in October 1947.

Four years later a familiar face was missing from the post office, Miss Pearl Hawkins retired from the money order division and as secretary of the U.S. Civil Examiners in the Lodi area.

Miss Hawkins went into the post office as a substitute clerk 33 years previously. She was the only employee in the money order division in those days, and her duties included the postal savings and COD and other duties. The post office became a highly specialized organization, in which

Miss Hawkins headed the money order division only.

Being the senior employee, Miss Hawkins gave the examination admitting all the other civil service employees at the post office. She was appointed secretary of the U.S. Civil Examiners for San Joaquin and surrounding counties in 1920.

The Hawkins family came to Lodi in 1901, and watched it grow from a village to a city. "They were growing a lot of almonds here when I first came," Miss Hawkins recalled.

"But they didn't do so well and it wasn't long before they were uprooting the almonds and setting in grapes instead."

She said the town had grown noticeably more prosperous. "You can see it in the luxurious homes going up in the past few years. The residential sections used to be much plainer."

The following write-up in the Lodi News-Sentinel in 1954 regarding John W. Koenig, 13th postmaster of Lodi is of general interest to the reader:

"John W. Koenig, Lodi's Postmaster, was born December 29, 1890, in a sodhouse (not a log cabin) on the plains of North Dakota. Because his father was an invalid it was necessary for him to take charge of the farm at

14. 'Because I am not a tall man my most difficult job was harnessing the horses.'

"In July, 1906, the family moved to Lodi and he again tried his hand at farming. He decided to give up farming when 18 and try something else. His first job was that of delivery boy for a grocery store and he later went into business for himself.

"In 1922, he sold his store and went back to the farm, getting a part time job in the post office to keep things going.

"He began his career in the Post Office in 1923 as a substitute clerk and was advanced to regular clerk in 1925. He was promoted to assistant postmaster in 1934 and to acting postmaster on April 1, 1953, receiving his commission on October 1. Along with his job at the post office he bought and sold real estate.

"Koenig is a busy and active man and as postmaster he is on call 24 hours a day. "But please don't say that too loudly." He is a member of the First Christian Church, Masonic Lodge, Elks Club, Lions Club, Woodbridge Golf and Country Club, Postmasters Assn., Postal Supervisors Assn. and

the Chamber of Commerce. In spare moments he enjoys stamp collecting and photography.

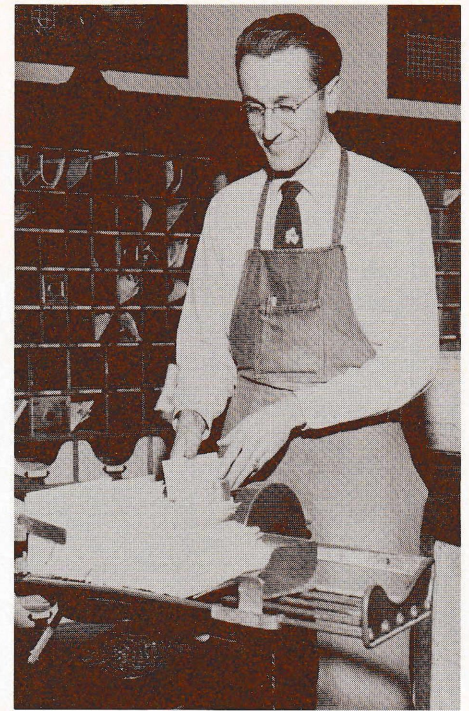
"The growth and progress of the Lodi Post Office since the days of 1891 when it was subordinate in importance to Woodbridge and Lockeford, has increased almost a quarter of a million in postal receipts. Postal receipts, during the calendar year of 1953, amounted to \$244,415.19. It is distinctly a post office for Lodi district people and they should feel it is their own."

The post office has 48 to 50 employees to serve a population of approximately 25,000. The four rural route carriers cover nearly 200 miles daily except Sundays and holidays, and there are 13 city delivery routes."

Mr. Koenig passed away Sept. 3, 1956.

It is interesting to note the growth of the post office over a period of 24 years. Annual gross receipts for 1912-1913 totalled a mere \$14,182.76. By 1935-1936 those gross receipts had grown nearly fourfold to \$52,139.47.

George Jahnel was Lodi's 14th postmaster. He was named acting postmaster March 22, 1957 to succeed



Ray Nowak hand cancels mail in the days before automation.

San Joaquin Historical Society photo

John W. Koenig who passed away while in office. Mr. Jahnel was a veteran of more than 21 years with the Lodi branch of the post office department.

Mr. Jahnel, a native of Chicago, came to Lodi in 1933. He first joined the department as a substitute clerk in Nov. 1935. Later he served as a regular clerk, clerk in charge, foreman and superintendent of mails. He was post master until May 1, 1970 when he retired.

With the exception of three years spent with the U.S. Marine Corps during World War II, Jahnel served in the local office without interruption.

Elated by the announcement of his appointment, Jahnel said his job would include the supervision of the entire local post office, including its nearly 50 employees and its service area, which included about 30,000 persons.

He said he would not take over his position until the district inspector for the department had completed a complete inventory of the post office building and equipment.

"Neither rain nor snow..." In true post office spirit Gus Nepote delivers mail on Christmas Eve.

San Joaquin Historical Society photo



Jahnel announced that Scott would remain as assistant postmaster and the current foreman, Leo M. Raugust, would probably be named superintendent of mails.

On Sept. 21, 1967, a longtime postal employee passed away in Lodi. He was Percy Dale Rathbun, aged 75.

Mr. Rathbun was a resident of Lodi for many years and had worked for the local post office for 38 years after which he drove a bus for the Lodi Union High School District for 13 years.

He was born in Lone Pine (Inyo County), but came to Lodi when five months of age. He attended the old Salem School and Lodi Union High School, and started work at the post office at the age of 18.

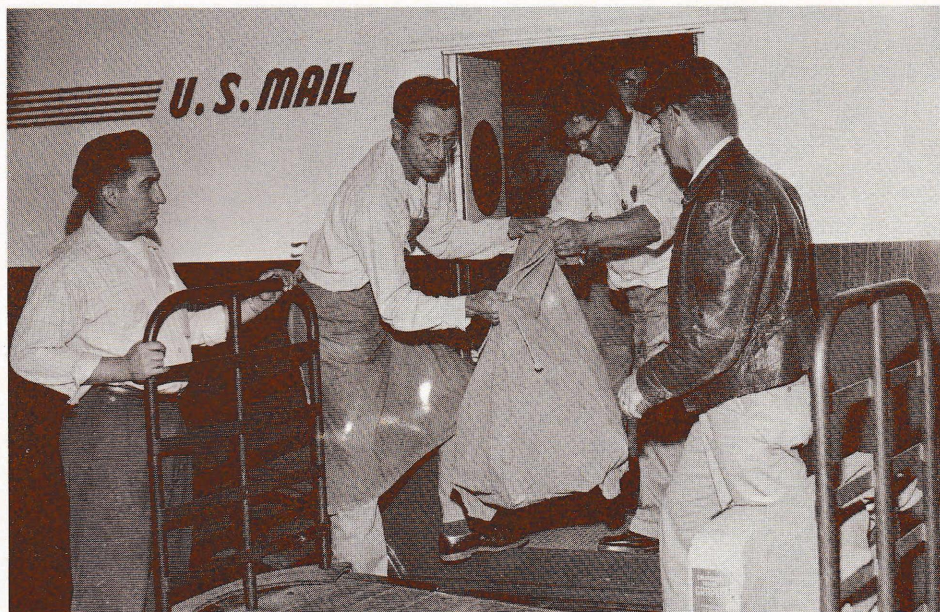
James H. Huber became Lodi's 15th postmaster on May 1, 1970. He had been Acting Postmaster and Officer in Charge of the Lodi office since the retirement of former Postmaster George R. Jahnel.

A career postal specialist, Huber was recommended for the post by a regional merit selection board established by the Postal Service.

Huber, a native of Bowdle, South Dakota, joined the service in 1947 as a mail carrier. After that, he was promoted to a clerking position, then to a supervisory job. He served as superintendent of the mails for six years and was Assistant Postmaster for a year.

He is in charge of 80 employees who work at both the main branch and the substation of the Lodi Post Office.

He said a new Assistant Postmaster



Left to right, Ken Isaak, Ray "Pike" Nowak, and an unidentified postal worker, load the U.S. mail.

is to be appointed in the near future. There will be recommendations made by himself and by the regional promotions board, with the final selection to be made from the San Francisco regional office.

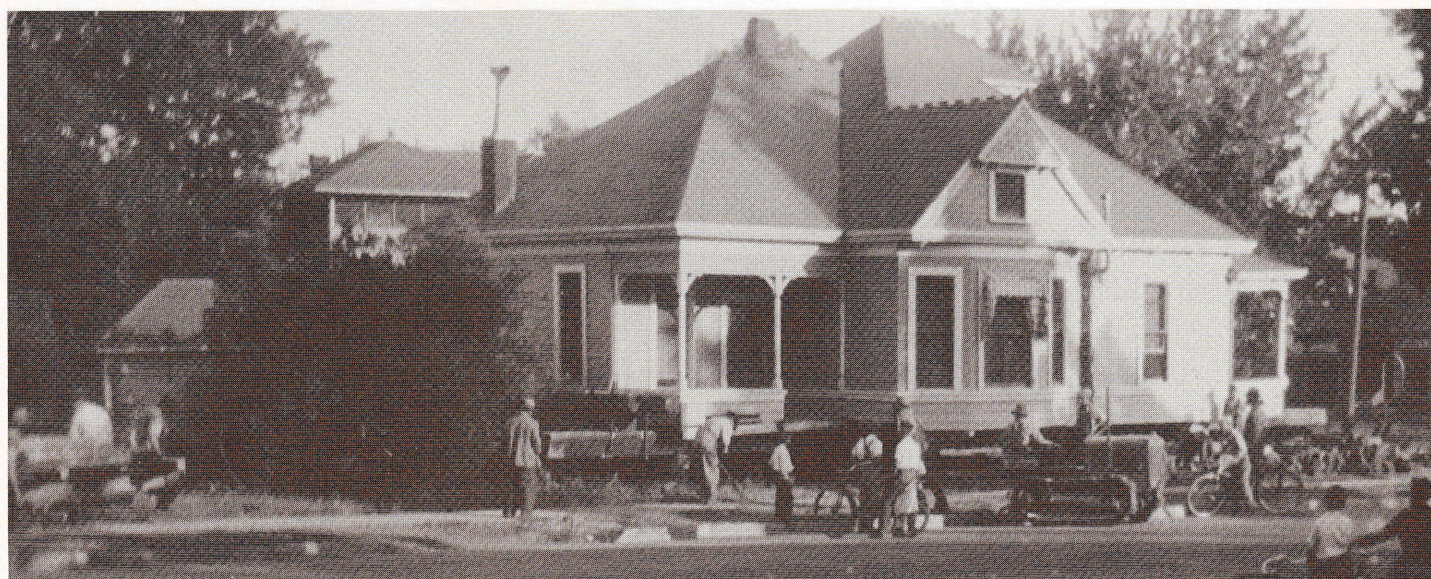
A veteran of 23 years with the California National Guard, Huber now holds the rank of Major and is assigned to the State Headquarters at Sacramento.

From the Lodi News-Sentinel of March 19, 1974: "Ira C. Shank, 84, a former employee in the Lodi Post Office and an insurance agent, died early Sunday in a Carmichael hospital following a long illness.

"Before he moved from Lodi, Shank worked for the post office from 1920 to 1945, then became an insurance agent in the early 1950's, and owned his own business until his retirement in 1969. His last insurance position was with T.A. Bowen and Sons Realtors.

"He was born in Stockton and raised in Linden. Shank attended Ashland College in Ohio from 1908 to 1911 and served in the United States Army during World War I, having been stationed with Battery B of the 37th Field Artillery."

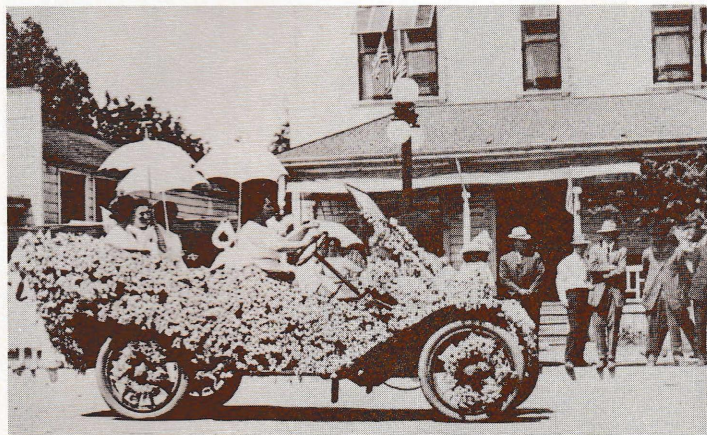
Paul Elmer Nichols, Assistant Lodi Postmaster in 1970, aided Maurice Hill in his research of post office records.



The Myrtle Green home was moved to make way for the new post office, corner of School and Walnut.

An Early Boarding Establishment

The Taylor House



The Taylor house at left as it appeared in the early part of this century. At right, shortly before demolition. Lodi residents may remember it as a second-hand furniture store.

by Maurice Hill

Thomas Taylor, son of James and Mary J. Taylor who came to the Lodi area in 1854 and settled on the Lower Sacramento road, married Mrs. Ellen Buckley in February 1874. The new Mrs. Taylor was born Sept. 18, 1848.

In an issue of the Lodi Cyclone of 1887 it is recorded that Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Taylor had moved to Lodi (from a farm on the Lower Sacramento Road) and bought a home on the southwest corner of Pine and School streets. The house was possibly built by W.C. Hull who once owned it. He sold it to Ralph Ellis who, in turn, sold it to Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Taylor. The short newspaper notice also mentioned that the Taylors would keep a few select boarders. Whether roomers were accommodated at this time isn't indicated, but it is possible.

Accounts do not agree as to the origin of the Taylor House which stood for years on the southwest corner of Sacramento and Oak streets. There are those who believe the building which the Taylors bought, when they came to town, was moved to the Sacramento Street location.

Others think a new building was erected on the new site. From a newspaper account in May of 1891 it would appear that the latter belief is

correct for the newspaper states that Mrs. Thomas Taylor's new house on Sacramento Street would be ready soon for occupancy.

Mrs. Taylor has been described as a gracious hostess, a kindly soul and a real gentlewoman with a host of friends. Mrs. Florence Sinks, deceased, once described her briefly as "tall and straight as a broomstick."

The late Mrs. Edith Ivory Henning told of Ellen (Nell for short) Taylor's excellent cooking, mentioning the huge sugar cookies which delighted the children of the neighborhood.

Ellen Taylor had, previous to marrying Mr. Taylor been married to a Mr. Buckley. The couple had one child, Josie. She took the name of her stepfather and was known thereafter as Josie Taylor until her wedding took place May 2, 1894. At this time she became the bride of Daniel McGee of Sacramento.

This marriage was described in the Lodi Review-Budget of which the following is a condensed resume:

"At St. Anne's Catholic Church in Lodi on Wednesday a.m. at nine o'clock Daniel McGee of Sacramento was married to Miss Josie Taylor of this place by Rev. Father Quill, assisted by Rev. Father W. O. Mahoney of the Youth's Directory of San Francisco.

"The church was lavishly decorated

with LaFrance roses, calla lillies, corn grass and La Marque sprays with hanging baskets of snowballs and syringa. There was a lovely arch, in front of the altar, of calla lillies from which was suspended as chimes, three bells of pale pinks with the bell ropes of white satin ribbon. These decorations were the work of Mrs. Rebecca Ivory assisted by Mesdames Gordon Sprague and Miss Mary Bragg.

"At the right hour carriages drove up to the church for the ceremony. The ushers were Dr. Blodgett and Charles Ferdun.

"The bride's costume was a poem in grey brocaded satin with a white illusion veil held in place by natural orange blossoms. She carried a bouquet of white La France roses.

"Miss Mamie Maher of Stockton was the bride's maid. She wore Nile green silk and carried the same kind of bouquet as the bride.

"The groom's best man was Mr. Nolan.

"After the ceremony, the wedding party congregated in the parlors of the Taylor House where a reception was held. Lovely refreshments were served, after which the guests viewed the large and costly display of gifts. The bridal couple left on the 11:40 a.m. train for the south.

"The bride is the only daughter of Mrs. Taylor of the Taylor House hotel. The new Mrs. McGee spent most of her life in and near Lodi. She is a popular young lady.

"The groom is an employee of the Southern Pacific railway having charge of the bridge builders on the Oakland and Sacramento division of road.

"The groom's gift to the bride was a diamond-set watch and the bride's gift to the groom was a diamond-set locket."

Judging from the architecture of the Taylor House, it would appear that it was originally built as a residence and that, later, an addition was added thus turning it into a hotel which could accommodate numerous guests.

G.W. Hill, took his family to Sunday dinner at the Taylor House. It was customary for the Hill family to go out to dinner after church services. One Sunday dinner might be at the Taylor House, the next at the old Lodi Hotel, etc. Fine meals were served at both places and at most reasonable prices. Chicken dinners at the Taylor House were being served at one time for as little as 25¢.

In August of 1905, Mr. and Mrs. Ed Cary leased the Taylor House and by late May 1906 the building was purchased by Levi Atwood of Lodi for \$8500. It was announced that Mrs. Taylor would retire from the hotel business.

After the hotel was no longer used as such, the lower floor became the home for the Lodi Coffee Shop, it having been moved from its former location by Mrs. Effie Valentine.

After serving Lodi for some length of time in this capacity, the building was taken over by Ed Hepper of Lodi who used the place as a new and used furniture store. Eventually, a modern structure was erected just south of the former hotel. It became the main furniture shop while the other was used as an annex.

At this phase of its existence, it would have been difficult to conceive of the interior having once been a hostelry, partitions having been removed giving the place a barnlike appearance. All types of second hand furniture were in evidence and towards the rear of the big room was a section devoted to the making and repairing of curtains.



Josie Taylor Magee and her husband. Mrs. Magee's mother kept the Taylor House establishment in Lodi.

Ed Atwood, formerly of Lodi, came into possession of the property after his father, Levi Atwood, passed on.

In December of 1954 the one-time Taylor House was torn down to make way for a new structure financed by Ed Atwood of Stockton. Lewis P. Singer was engaged as contractor for the \$25,000 building and it was built with four units.

It is noteworthy that Mrs. Ellen Taylor lived to see some of the changes made in the house that she had built in 1891. She passed away in Sacramento at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Daniel McGee, June 17, 1925 at the age of 76 years. She was interred at Woodbridge cemetery where her daughter was also buried at a later date.

Only old timers passing the former location of the Taylor House can mentally visualize it as it was in the early 1900's. And no doubt an occasional sigh betrays their regret at the passing of things that used to be.

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